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“Sniffing Out Terrorism: The Use of Dogs in Homeland Security”

House Committee on Homeland Security’s Subcommittee on  
Management, Integration, and Oversight

My name is Terri Recknor. I am the President of Garrison & Sloan, Inc., a Canine Detection Company based in Miami, Florida. My partner Tony Guzman was scheduled to appear before you today is unfortunately dealing with a number of family issues and cannot be here. My partner is also the President of Metro-Dade K-9 a canine facility specializing in the training of canines and handlers for state and local law enforcement. Mr. Guzman has been training and working with canines for over 24 years.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there has been an unprecedented need for explosive detection canines, both in law enforcement and the private sector. Prior to 9-11, there were very few private canine detection companies. The majority of those companies worked exclusively in narcotics detection. Garrison & Sloan is unique in that it was one of the few canine detection companies that had an extensive inventory of fully trained and certified explosive canine teams.

Let me emphasize that, at this point, there is no national standard for the licensing and certification of private industry explosive detection companies. When we state that our company is licensed and certified, it means the following. We possess a Federal Department of Justice, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) license for explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) license for narcotics and all state and local licenses to train and certify our explosive and narcotic canines. Our canines are independently certified by Florida International University. In addition, to my knowledge we are the only privately-owned company in the United States to have its explosive canines certified by the Department of Defense.

Immediately following 9-11 the need was so great for explosive detection canines that private detection canine companies were formed overnight. Many of these companies that were formed overnight claimed to have fully trained canines. It should be noted for the record that the average time it takes Garrison & Sloan to purchase a canine, train and certify an explosive detection canine is usually a minimum of 5 months. The fact of the matter is a newly formed canine detection company that is properly licensed and certified cannot be fully operational for months.

I would be the first to admit that because of the lack of a national standard, our industry has been seriously tainted by a number of fraudulent companies. Within the last two years, a private company in Virginia working for the Federal Government was indicted and found guilty for fraudulent canine services. Their

canines were tested with explosives and did not alert. The owner was convicted and is currently serving time in a federal prison.

It should also be noted that as a general rule most Federal State and Local Governmental agencies will not contract with private industry canine companies. Once again, it is my opinion that the reason for this is the lack of a national standard and the potential liability that would be attached by the governmental agency if the dogs should fail.

Today it is my understanding that TSA, Customs and Border Protection Bureau, and the ATF collectively have no more than 1,700 trained canine teams in the United States. The majority of the TSA teams are located at the major metropolitan airports while the CBP teams are located along the U.S. borders. If one were to do the math, the number of federally trained canine teams would amount to approximately 35 per state. Given the most recent events of the train bombings in Madrid, Spain and London, England, I do not believe that this amount of dogs is anywhere near sufficient to protect our airports, seaports, subway systems, train station's and our national treasures.

In order to make an argument as to why governmental agencies should use properly licensed and certified private canine companies I would like to tell you how we obtain, train and certify our canines. My partner Tony Guzman travels to Europe 6 – 8 times per year to purchase canines. He deals with well-established breeders throughout Europe. Why Europe? Europe is known for breeding the finest working dogs in the world. Once a dog is chosen by our company he must go through a rigorous 12-week training course. Our canines are trained on real explosives and real narcotics, which we obtain legally. ATF has very strict policies that must be adhered to before granting a license. Upon completion of training our canines must be certified. Our certification process is conducted by an independent entity—The Florida International University. After training and certification our canines must be tested weekly with explosives and narcotics to keep their level of proficiency at maximum performance. You should also be aware that it is our opinion for efficiency and effectiveness purposes that canines should not be dual trained. By that I mean our explosive canines are only trained on explosives and our narcotic canines are only trained on narcotics, we do not cross-train.

Unfortunately, what I described to you is not the norm in our industry, it is the exception. The actual norm in our industry is that XYZ Company either purchases a dog from wherever it can find one or it goes to the local pound. Most Customs

and Border Patrol dogs, for your information come from animal shelters, humane societies and rescue operations as reported in the Government Executive magazine dated September 1, 2005. Since most private industry companies cannot afford or legally possess an ATF license, they purchase pseudo (substitute) explosives. The canine is then trained on pseudo explosives and the trainer allegedly certifies the dog himself. These dogs cannot go through an independent legitimate certification process because they would fail.

Another scenario that we see in our industry is that canine Company A pays an ATF certified canine Company B to utilize their ATF certification. Company A is located in North Carolina but uses Company B's license which is located in California.

In the past four years we have seen every type of rogue canine company imaginable. Quite possibly, a national standard is still years away but there are steps that can be taken now to ensure the integrity of private industry canine detection companies. These steps include greater oversight by ATF and DEA in the licensing and certification of private canine detection facilities. A quick look on the Internet and you will find all types of canine companies that market their services. You will also see that these companies represent that they possess an ATF or DEA license. When a prospective client researches these companies they "assume" what is printed on the website is fact. However, for the most part, it is fiction.

While the Federal government today, principally TSA and CBP do not use private industry canines, I would respectfully request, given the shortage of canine teams throughout the United States, that private industry canine teams who could meet or surpass the standards set by these government entities be permitted to be hired by the federal government. Should our canines fail to meet the same standards as that of the government then we should be released from the contract. However, it is my earnest belief that our private canine teams could meet and exceed the standards set by the federal government.

In addition to the above I would like to advise you that after 9-11 the cruise line industry was the first to step up and hire private canine companies. Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Lines were at the forefront in their industry. They set the standard of insuring that all goods loaded on board their ships were screened by explosive detection canines. Last year, this committee, which was chaired by Congressman Cox, watched our company demonstrate the screening process for Royal Caribbean at the Port of Miami. This Committee observed how

quickly a dog could screen a row of pallets to insure that no explosives were present. At that demonstration Congressman Cox asked me why dogs were not being utilized at airports. My answer then remains the same as it is today, and that is “private canine companies are not permitted by TSA to screen cargo at the airports.”

All too often we watch on the nightly news how airline cargo is not screened and how our subways and train stations are not appropriately searched by explosive canine teams. The general consensus is that it would be too expensive and time-consuming to search all the cargo being loaded onto a plane and or packages and individuals boarding subways and trains. Perhaps this is true with electronic searching devices. However, canines could facilitate this screening process in a fraction of the time and for a fraction of the cost compared to utilizing mechanical testing equipment.

You should also be aware that in addition to screening for the cruise lines, we are fortunate to work exclusively for Federal Express. Like Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Lines, FedEx is a leader in their industry. Shortly after 9-11 FedEx hired us at numerous airports around the country to screen packages being loaded on their aircraft. They chose explosive canines for their thoroughness, accuracy and speed. As you know FedEx is all about speed but they have not forgotten about security.

Screening air cargo by private canine detection companies could be managed the same way that cruise line cargo and FedEx packages are screened.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. While our industry needs national standards and increased oversight of those standards, we welcome the opportunity to work along side and with our federal state and local government counterparts to ensure the safety and security of our nation. I do not believe at the present time that the level of qualified and certified detection teams at the federal state and local level are sufficient to protect the facilities that need to be screened. I would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee has and once again I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

